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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR  
GOLDBERGER/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL;  
TREASURY FOR SZUBIN/LOEFFLER/NUGENT/HIRSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2018  
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KWBG](#)  
SUBJECT: BETHLEHEM RUNS OUT OF GAS AS STATION OWNERS  
PROTEST ORDER TO REROUTE FUEL SUPPLIES

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Most Bethlehem gas stations were closed February 21 after running out of fuel, the result of a protest against an Israeli decision to reroute Bethlehem's fuel supplies through the Tarqumiya commercial terminal 40 kilometers to the south. On February 17, the IDF halted fuel shipments from Israel into the West Bank via the Route 60/Tunnel crossing point near Bethlehem. Bethlehem gas station owners responded by refusing to purchase fuel crossing through Tarqumiya, calling the route too long, too costly, and too risky. End Summary.

¶2. (C) According to Mojaheed Salameh, Director General of the Palestinian Authority Petroleum Corporation, the IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) informed him in early January that it was considering closing the Route 60 Tunnel crossing to fuel trucks. The closure came without additional notice on February 17, said Salameh, when the IDF halted "back-to-back" transfers of fuel from Israeli to Palestinian tanker trucks at the Route 60 crossing near Bethlehem. Salameh said COGAT ordered Bethlehem gas station owners to purchase their fuel through the Tarqumiya commercial crossing point, 40 kilometers south of the city. Bethlehem station owners decided to boycott fuel passing through Tarqumiya in protest. Salameh told Econoff about 90 percent of Bethlehem's gas stations are now closed after running out of fuel.

¶3. (C) According to Fayez Omar, who owns two gas stations in Bethlehem, local station owners are refusing to buy fuel from Tarqumiya because of additional time, cost, and risk. The route from Tarqumiya to Bethlehem, said Omar, is an 80 kilometer round-trip on crowded roads, also used by Israeli settlers, that pass through populated areas. He added that there are no procedures in place for transferring fuel back-to-back at Tarqumiya, and said that Bethlehem station owners will be competitively disadvantaged vis-a-vis purchasers from Hebron, which is closer to Tarqumiya. Omar vowed to continue the boycott and warned that fuel for emergency and security services will soon run short.

¶4. (C) Nabil Al Bandak of the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce told us that gas station owners and Chamber officials will meet Bethlehem Governor Salah Al Tamari on February 23 to discuss next steps. Al Bandak added that textile industry representatives will join the meeting because COGAT has also closed the Route 60 crossing for Palestinian textile exports, likewise requiring them to use Tarqumiya.

¶5. (C) The threat of closure of the Route 60 crossing point to Bethlehem commercial traffic has been hanging over the

city since late last year. Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce Chairman Samir Hazboun told Econoff that COGAT gave notice in late December that it would require Bethlehem commercial traffic to use Tarqumiya, but reversed the decision after he filed a written protest. Hazboun said the IDF also closed the crossing to Bethlehem's stone and marble industry for a few days in late January, diverting traffic to Tarqumiya and other south West Bank crossings. That decision was also rescinded after an industry outcry.

WALLES